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As a black man, as well a reporter, from inside the historic convening of black Americans from all walks of life, from every political ideology and with the widest range of ideas on how America must be dealt with for meaningful change, I was literally awed at how everyone entered into soul-stirring dialogue in the 15 workshops set up for the conference. Considering how many of those groups were previously committed to having no talks with others of supposedly opposite views, it seemed a miracle for these black men and women to be so unified.

All seemed to understand one thing -- that people who some in America persecute solely because they are black, must unite under that banner of blackness and fight the adversary with a common front... even though that struggle may be with variant tactics, dependent upon our own particular political bent or persuasion.

I spent three days at the conference, which was headquartered at the Cathedral House of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark. (This "neutral" ground was important to the gathering together of so disparate a group. Thus, Bishop Leland Stark deserves great credit for his contribution in this regard). My time was divided between three different workshops. This was most unusual because all participants were required to spend their full three days pursuing the same topics with the same people. At the conclusion of this arduous thought period, they were to come up with some new ideas and some meaningful recommendations to be submitted simply for spirit and essence to the conference body at large, which was merely an ad hoc group for study and discussion purposes. Many of the people with whom I talked stated they had never worked so hard and enjoyed it so much in all their life. I was allowed the privilege of moving about solely because I was another black brother; not because I was a member of the press. My only restriction was that I not interview anyone except during regular press interview time.

When I did talk with people about their reaction to the conference, every person seemed to feel that being part of so diverse a group of black men and black women sitting down together was something they had never imagined. Since the conference's purpose was solely to have these kinds of black people get together and talk about ways to empower our now-powerless part of American society, the meeting was a complete success. A number of events, however, gave excitement and created temporary problems, which in the end, served to build-in more unity and a sense of common purpose.

The most hair-raising event at the often-tense conference was the attack on the newsmen. As background, all press people were informed that they would have daily press conferences in this otherwise closed convening on the condition that interviews with participants

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be held only during designated hours. (This had come about as a compromise after some black participants strongly objected to any form of interviews by the so-called white press). This procedure was violated several times by the press -- and they were told that this was being provocative. So, on Saturday afternoon when the press, itself, created a disturbance by violating the agreement in a very damaging way, those who had objected to their presence from the beginning stated to the officials that they wanted them all removed from the conference for good.

Not knowing that these men meant this seriously, the conference press people went ahead with the scheduled afternoon interview session. I was in the room set aside for interviewing when a group of no more than 5 or 6 men came storming in. Shouts of "white press get out" were heard...cameras were overturned...newsmen scrambled through windows. It was an exciting three or four minutes with total damage--other than to camera equipment -- amounting to a couple of blood-stained newsmen and one small stool. The incident was unfortunate in one way -- and yet, as a black man from inside the conference, it was an understandable reaction by a few, who not only felt betrayed by the press at the conference, but also had previously experienced irresponsible reporting by their local press time and time again.

This incident -- the conference's most upsetting one -- proved to be a galvanizing agent. It was followed immediately by a plenary session, where all the dissident voices were heard. Emotions ran high. Surprisingly, one of those considered most militant, Charles "X" Kenyatta of the so-called Mau Mau's, was the one that seemed to do most to bring reason and order back to the conference. His reiteration of the fact that we were not there to concern ourselves with what was wrong with white people, but to deal with the unity of black people clearly brought him into the rank of statesman in the eyes of all the pleased, but surprised delegates. From that point on until the end of the conference, it was hard work for all. Ladies on relief from Rochester and many other cities were in caucuses with people like Alexander Allen of the National Urban League and field workers from S.N.C.C. The Reverend Jesse Jackson of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (Operation Breadbasket), Black Muslims and black Nationalists met with corporation sponsored black executives on problems common to all black people -- and which must be answered for the good of our nation.

Black journalists like Lerone Bennett, Sam Yette, Hoyt Fuller, C. Summer Stone and Dan Watts took part in the administration of the conference. Black detectives from the Newark police and black nationalists worked hand in hand to guard the conference. The only threats to tranquility came when "outsiders" tried to assert themselves.

Black lawyers, black doctors, black social workers and black public officials could not be distinguished from black ghetto dwellers

and black activists. All were concerned about one thing -- achieving power so that black men and black women could all be a part of the American system, by having an investment in it. This goal is good not only for blacks, but also for white because people who have equitable investments in anything are not easily moved to destroy it through riot or rebellion.

Notably absent from the conference were co-called "civil rights" leaders like Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young Jr. Their names came up at the conference in side discussions many times. A large number of the conferees seemed concerned that these are the men so often called upon to speak for the black community when neither of them represent black organizations. The National Urban League is a conservative interracial organization dedicated to fulfilling the unmet needs of industry -- they are not activists and they are not black. The NAACP surely is not a black organization because the majority of the decision-making power is in the hands of white people. Key spots like the presidency, the head of their labor and educational units, as well as the Chief Legal Counsel all are white. This does not mean that these organizations do not do a great deal of good, but they still do not represent or speak for black people in the hearts of the cities.

These men could have, however, added much to the conference -- and benefitted themselves by identifying far more closely with the black people who increasingly and understandably suspect the black people who will even allow the label "middle-class" to be placed upon them. The tendency is for black people to realize that black Americans are all of the one class that Ron Karenga calls the "black class".

Another unique feature about this convening which would so much facilitate the gathering together of so ideologically widespread a representation of black Americans was that the planning committee represented no organization. This committee was comprised of five evidently quite capable persons, who would engender support from the black ghetto masses and the so-called middle class. They were Isaiah Robinson, Omar Ahmed, Ron Karenga, C. Sumner Stone, and Dr. Nathaniel Wright Jr. who served as conference chairman. Secondly and perhaps for the good of future convenings, no new formal organizational structure was discussed.

Because this was an ad hoc discussion group, all resolutions submitted to this temporary body could only be received for support of spirit and essence, giving voice to those groups already committed to those purposes or strategies. This achieved black unity in a tactical sense, yet bound no man or organization to any endeavor which he felt counter to his personal choice. The one resolution endorsed by the conference -- and apparently felt needed by all -- was to identify all black Americans as Black Americans, rather than as Negroes.

Thus, from inside the conference, this increased pride in blackness seemed to be the most refreshing new light of all.